

DOC Budget Update

Feb. 23, 2009

The subcommittee reviewing the Department of Corrections budget for the next two years has finished its work.

The Joint Subcommittee on Judicial Branch, Law Enforcement and Justice reduced the DOC's budget request by \$12.7 million. The seven-member subcommittee's actions were unanimous and bipartisan.

The budget still has a long way to go through the legislative process.

The budget is expected to come before the House Appropriations Committee during the first week of March, after legislators return from their mid-session break. The committee can make more changes, as can the full House, the Senate Finance and Claims Committee, the Senate and finally a joint conference committee that will be appointed to resolve differences between the House and Senate versions of the overall state budget.

The reductions made this week reflect the decreases in projections for the amount of revenue the state expects to collect. The declining economy has caused drops in those revenue forecasts that total \$250 million.

Two of the most significant subcommittee changes in the DOC budget involve secure care and probation and parole.

The subcommittee reduced requested funding for contracted secure care beds by \$5.1 million. The action not only rejected the department's request for funding for an additional 60 beds, it removed funding for 165 beds already filled or approved.

The subcommittee also eliminated the department's request for \$1.7 million to hire 20 additional probation and parole staff to supervise an offender population expected to increase by 587 over the next two years.

Other major changes to the budget included:

- Elimination of funding for a sex offender treatment program outside of prison (\$4.9 million)
- Money to place in the Great Falls Prerelease Center geriatric and elderly inmates (\$963,000)
- Postponement of adding 30 beds to the START revocation and sanction program until after mid-2010 (\$1.04 million)
- Elimination of funding for creation of a new 20-bed prerelease center on the Flathead Reservation (\$489,000)
- Removing money to cover higher rent costs in a new building for central office (\$789,000)
- Eliminated funding for an new organic farming program at Montana State Prison (\$293,000)
- Restored funding for the Juvenile Delinquency Intervention Program (\$2 million)
- Increased the daily rate paid to prerelease centers and treatment programs by 1 percent the first year and 2 percent the second year (\$1.2 million)

- Increased by 2 percent the first year and 4 percent the second year the daily rate paid Corrections Corporation of America for inmates at Crossroads Correctional Center in Shelby (\$646,000)
- Provided funding to maintain the staff transportation program for Montana State Prison employees (\$364,000)

The subcommittee decided to let the department determine how to divide \$1.5 million between expanding use of the WATCH DUI treatment program and the Connections Corrections substance abuse treatment program. The department had requested about \$2.7 million to expand both programs.

Director Mike Ferriter told the committee he was concerned about the lack of additional probation and parole officers at a time when the number of probationers and parolees is expected to increase by nearly 600. He also expressed concern that the proposed budget for secure care will not leave the department with enough prison space.